What is claimed is:

1   1.   A method for use with a computer system, comprising:

2   storing a table in a memory of a peripheral, the table including entries identifying

3 different packet flows;

4   receiving a packet; and

5   using the table to associate the packet with one of the packet flows.

1   2.   The method of claim 1, wherein the packet indicates a header and the act of using

2 the table comprises:

3   parsing the packet to identify at least one characteristic of the packet; and

4   comparing said at least one characteristic to the entries.

1   3.   The method of claim 1, wherein said at least one characteristic comprises:

2   a port number being associated with an application.

1   4.   The method of claim 1, wherein said at least one characteristic comprises:

2   a security attribute.

1   5.   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2   based on the association, selectively using hardware to process the packet.

1   6.   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2   based on the association, selectively executing software to process the packet.

1   7.   The method of claim 1, wherein the peripheral comprises:

2   a network controller.

1   8.   The method of claim 1, further comprising:

2   storing the packet in another memory of the peripheral.

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1   9.   A network controller for use with a computer system, comprising:

2   a memory adapted to store a table including entries identifying different packet

3   flows;

4   a first interface adapted to receive a packet from a network; and

5   a circuit adapted to use the table to associate the packet with one of the packet

6   flows.

1   10.   The network controller of claim 9, further comprising:

2   a second interface adapted to furnish at least a portion of the packet to a memory

3   of the computer system based on the association.

1   11.   The network controller of claim 9, wherein the packet indicates a header and the

2   circuit is further adapted to:

3   parse the packet to identify at least one flow characteristic of the packet, and

4   compare the said at least one characteristic to the entries to associate the packet

5   with one of the flows.

1   12.   The network controller of claim 9, wherein said at least one characteristic

2   comprises:

3   a port number.

1   13.   The network controller of claim 9, wherein said at least one characteristic

2   comprises:

3   a security attribute.

1   14.   A computer system comprising:

2   a system memory;

3   a processor; and

4   a peripheral comprising:

5   a peripheral memory adapted to store a table including entries identifying

6 different packet flows;

7   a first interface adapted to receive a packet;

8   a second interface adapted to communicate with the system memory; and

9   a circuit adapted to:

10   use the table to associate the packet with one of the packet flows,

11 and

12   based on the association, interact with the second interface to

13 selectively transfer a portion of the packet to the system memory for processing by the

14 processor.

1   15.   The computer system of claim 14, wherein the peripheral comprises:

2   a network controller.

1   16.   The computer system of claim 14, wherein the packet indicates a header and the

2 circuit is further adapted to:

3   parse the packet to identify flow characteristics of the packet; and

4   compare the characteristics to the entries to associate the packet with one of the

5 packet flows.

1   17.   The computer system of claim 14, wherein the characteristics comprise:

2   a port number.

1   18.   The computer system of claim 14, wherein the characteristic comprise:

2   a security attribute.

1   19.   The computer system of claim 14, further comprising:

2   another memory coupled to the first interface and adapted to store the packet.